



HIGHER LAW #8: WHEN PEOPLE
SET THEIR OWN TARGETS, THEY
USUALLY HIT THEM

WHY ASI EARNED THE GREAT GAME OF BUSINESS HIGH-INVOLVEMENT PLANNING ALL-STAR AWARD

**NOT EVERY BUSINESS HAS A PLAN. FOR THE ONES WHO DO, THE QUESTION
BECOMES: WHOSE PLAN IS IT?**

Based in Forsyth, Missouri, American Syscomptel, Inc. (ASI) is a veteran-owned manufacturer of custom wire harnesses, cable assemblies, and contract manufacturing solutions, serving industries from automotive and agricultural to medical and industrial equipment. Founded to create meaningful jobs in rural America, ASI has built its business on high-quality manufacturing, community impact, and a culture of employee involvement and continuous improvement.

For years, Doug Chowning, an Air Force veteran who took over the business from his father, did what many owners do when planning for the business's future. He disappeared into his office, writing strategic plans, developing scorecards, and refining the company's core values. Every year he emerged with another roadmap for the future, yet each year he felt the same frustration.

"IT WAS ALWAYS MY PLAN," CHOWNING SAYS. "AND I WAS ALWAYS UNHAPPY."

The strategy wasn't the problem. Ownership of it was. Everything changed when ASI embraced High-Involvement Planning™, with the help of coach Jack O'Riley. Instead of asking employees to execute someone else's vision, ASI began building the future together.

That shift transformed planning from an annual individual exercise done by the owner into the business's operating system—earning ASI this year's High-Involvement Planning All-Star Award.

HIGH-INVOLVEMENT PLANNING LESSON #1

STRATEGY ISN'T SOMETHING LEADERS CREATE ALONE

Chowning wasn't searching for another planning process. He was searching for a better way to lead. Like many entrepreneurs, he had experimented with various management systems before discovering The Great Game of Business in 2021 at a Chamber of Commerce event. He immediately immersed himself in learning the system, choosing to implement much of it himself to understand it deeply rather than simply following a recipe.

For the first few years, Chowning kept things intentionally simple. He opened the books and taught the financials. They built a scorecard and shared profits as bonuses. Employees responded immediately. **Inspired by the movie Red Tails, about the Tuskegee Airmen, they adopted a rallying cry for every major win and special occasion: "We fight!" That unified spirit helped the team earn more than \$200,000 in bonuses each of those first two years.** The company also invested in new machines, equipment, and tools to improve future productivity and quality. Trust grew, and conversations improved. People cared more deeply about the business. But Chowning eventually realized the financials weren't the destination. They were the invitation.

“UP TO THAT POINT I DIDN'T THINK I WAS READY TO FULLY EMBRACE ALL ASPECTS OF THE GAME LIKE HIGH-INVOLVEMENT PLANNING. BUT AFTER THE SUCCESS OF THE FIRST TWO YEARS AND THEN THE DEATH OF MY FATHER, I WAS READY TO HIRE A COACH AS I KNEW I NEEDED HELP IF IT WAS TO BE SUCCESSFUL.”

— DOUG CHOWNING,
PRESIDENT



HIGH-INVOLVEMENT PLANNING LESSON #2

THE BEST STRATEGY BEGINS WITH A QUESTION

The magic of unlocking the full potential of ASI's employees didn't come through a spreadsheet. It came through a conversation. Chowning began asking employees something many of them had never heard from a business owner:

"WHAT DO YOU THINK WE SHOULD DO?"

It seems like such a simple question, but it changes everything, including Chowning shifting from owner to teacher. **Instead of waiting for instructions, people began offering ideas. Instead of simply carrying out the plan, they began helping to create it.** Chowning discovered something many leaders underestimate. His employees weren't waiting to be motivated. They were waiting to be invited. That realization changed the way ASI approached planning forever.

"We don't seem to have the courage to set the targets high enough," says Chowning, "For example, what we thought was an aggressive Level 10 bonus the first two years turned out to be too easy."

HIGH-INVOLVEMENT PLANNING LESSON #3

PEOPLE COMMIT TO THE FUTURE THEY HELP BUILD

When Chowning realized he needed help developing a truly shared strategic plan, with O'Riley's help, ASI developed its first High-Involvement Planning process. The difference was immediate. Rather than focusing solely on annual budgets, the team looked ten years ahead. Together, they set an ambitious goal: reach \$20 million in revenue by 2035.

But the destination wasn't the most valuable part. The roadmap was. The team identified the hiring they would need, the leadership they would have to develop, the training systems they would have to build, and the management structure required to support growth. Weekly strategic Huddles now keep everyone focused on the handful of priorities that move the company closer to that shared vision. High-Involvement Planning doesn't just create alignment once a year. It creates alignment every week.

"It has become the most important thing we do," says Chowning.

HIGH-INVOLVEMENT PLANNING LESSON #4

PREPARATION LOOKS EXPENSIVE— UNTIL YOU NEED IT

Perhaps the greatest validation of ASI's planning came unexpectedly. The team spent months preparing for growth. They formalized hiring, improved onboarding, strengthened management, and expanded training. **At times, those investments felt premature. Then demand exploded, and orders surged far beyond expectations.**

Many businesses would have been forced into constant reaction. ASI already had a plan. Instead of wondering what to do next, the team simply began executing the roadmap they had built together. Planning hadn't predicted the future. It had prepared the company for it.

It's easy to think High-Involvement Planning is about creating better strategy. Chowning would tell you it's about developing better leaders focused on a shared vision of the future.

"WE HAD LEADERS, BUT THEY COULD NOT BE WORKING TOWARDS A SHARED VISION IF WE DIDN'T HAVE ONE," SAYS CHOWNING. "OUR OLD STRATEGIC PLANS DID LAY OUT A FUTURE VISION, BUT I DID NOT STRESS THE SHARED ASPECT AS IT WAS MOSTLY MY VISION."

At ASI today, strategic discussions occur every week. Employees understand not only where the company is headed but also why. They have built a common language that's become their communication process. New hires learn about the business from their first day. Forecasts drive conversations. MiniGames reinforce priorities. Planning has become part of everyday work rather than something leadership does behind closed doors. Most importantly, employees know the future isn't something that happens to them. It's something they're helping build.

MORE THAN STRATEGIC PLANNING

When you spend enough time talking with Chowning, every conversation eventually returns to one phrase. Improving lives. His father quietly lived that philosophy as he built the company and created opportunities for community members, especially those working in the hospitality industry, to move into higher-paying jobs. The Great Game gave Chowning a framework for carrying it forward by helping employees pursue goals that extend well beyond work. For Chowning, business and life success aren't competing priorities. They're connected.

“ THE WHOLE-LIFE CONCEPT IS MORE IMPORTANT,
WE'RE IMPROVING LIVES. ”

— DOUG CHOWNING,
PRESIDENT

Ask Chowning what changed most at ASI over the past four years, and he won't start with revenue, bonuses, or strategic planning. He'll point to himself.

“The only thing holding this company back is me,” he said.

That's not self-criticism. It's leadership. He stopped believing he needed all the answers. He began asking better questions. He stopped writing plans for his team and started building them with them. That's the essence of High-Involvement Planning. It isn't about creating a better strategic document. It's about creating a team that believes the future belongs to them. When the plan becomes our plan rather than my plan, something remarkable happens. People stop executing the strategy and start owning it.

That's why ASI has earned the Great Game of Business High-Involvement Planning All-Star Award.